Chapter 2

WOMEN IN THE VARṆA-RATNĀKAR

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In the history of medieval India, the rule of Karṇāṭa dynasty (1097----1325 A.D.) in Mithila is significant. For Northern India that age, in general, was chaotic and people were ill-governed. But in Mithila due to a number of reasons there was comparatively a greater peace and a seemingly more durable appearance of the social order. In northern India, the Karṇāṭa dynasty of Mithila was the only Hindu kingdom which was able to keep itself off some how from the general aggression and persecution of Mohammedans. But under Feroze Shah even this isolated equanimity of that Hindu Kingdom was broken. Harisimhadeva, the ruler of Mithila, had to retire into the interior Tarai area in Nepal as a result of an encroaching and aggressive Mohammadan army.[1]

The name of Kaviśekharācārya Jyotirīśvara Thakkura, stands pre-eminently as a pioneer of great force and excellence in the annals of the modern Indo-Aryan language. His immortal work, *Varṇa-Ratnākara,* is the earliest undisputed literary specimen of Maithili. According to S.K. Chatterji, *Varṇa-Ratnākara* is one of a comparatively small number of authentic works in a modern Indo- Aryan language which goes so far back.[2] Written in 1318 A.D. it is preserved in a unique on palm-leaf now in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, in its Government collection of Mss. (No.48/34). The Ms. is written in old Maithili character. It originally contained 77 folia, but 17 of these are now missing (folia 1' to 9 at the beginning; folia 11 and 12, 14 and 15, 19, 26 and 27). The leaves measure from 15" long by 17/8" to 2-broad, fairly well preserved, but some pages are slightly damaged by white ants. The work is in prose. It is a sort of lexicon of vernacular and Sanskrit terms, a repository of literary similes and conventions dealing with the various things in the world and ideas which are usually treated in poetry. Pandita Hara Prasad Shastri has always referred to the work as Varnana-Ratnakara, because varanana means description but S.K. Chatterji sticks to the name Varna-Ratnakara and writes that varna of course does not mean description. There were apparently more than seven chapters, probably eight.

The chapters are suitably called kallolas, streams or waves, as the work is a ratnakara or sea.[3]

Jyotirsvara Thakkura, a Mithila Brahmana, is a well known scholar-writer in the medieval Sanskrit literature. His two works *Dhurtasamāgama and Pañca-śāyaka* are famous for being extensively quoted in later Sanskrit literature. The *Dhurtasamāgama* is a popular work. There are a large number of Mss. of this farce and besides it has been printed several times. His other work *Pañca-śāyaka* is a Sanskrit drama. It is in five sections and is in verse. It indicates special significance of an erotic social ethos. It deals with the secret processes of love and the varied types of bandhas. One gets glimpses of the different types of nayikas in it. The preparation of various aphrodisiacs and drugs, articles of toilet, charms and philtres, and the different types of women have also been mentioned. It describes the treatment of women in pregnancy.[4] Thus the erotic life of well-placed men and women has been portrayed well by Jyotirīśvara. According to Manmohan Chakravarti,[5] an other work of Jyotirīśvara is the *Rañjaśekhara*. It is also a sexual science like the *Pancasayaka*.

The position of women differed little from the past. Some taking clue from Manu 'yatra naryastu pujyante ramante tatra devatah' think high of the women of the time. But various sources e.g. *Sūtragrantha, Purana, Puncatantra* and *Hitopadesa* speak of the women as not so high and worthy enough for reverence.[6] In the *Gita*[7] women and Sudra have been kept in the same category. According to Krishna "those who are born, as sinners (Women, Shudra and Vaisya), they too can attain salvation." The word papayoni shows how much the birth of a woman was condemned. In the *Agni-Purana*[8] we find that a person who kills a woman has to under go the same kind of penance as on killing a Shudra. This view has been found in *Parāsara-smriti* too.[9] Since the beginning of the agricultural society women, with a few exceptions, have been depicted as an object of enjoyment by some male writers.[10] The attraction of a male for a female and of a female for a male is natural. But generally this mutual attraction was not accepted by the male.

They felt only their own side and neglected the sentiments and aspirations of women.

The condition of women in general was demoralising. The Shudras and the women were placed in the same category.[11] The society had no respect for them. They were treated as an object to luxury and sexual gratifications. Jyotirīśvara describes the two sides of female character in the *Varṇa-Ratnākara.*[12] The lexicon gives a two-fold view of the women. In the first place, they have been portrayed with the help of simile and metaphors in a rather poetic manner: "purnima ka chanda amrita purala aisana muha,[13] pārijātaka pallava aisana hatha[14] and vikasita sthala padma aisna charana". This concept of women as the good and the beautiful is obviously, in accordance with rather strict observance of what men thought of them when they acted as they desired. The other awareness, of a real situation, of woman in love or the prostitute, in love, for a woman is thus described, "smashana" stri ka charitra aisan daruna (dreadful like female character)' "andhakara" (darkness) strihka charitra aisan durlakshya (unseen like female character), dakini ka lila (sportive display of the witch).[15] Kritrima lajja (unnatural bashfulness), kapata tarunya (fraud youth), dhanarthe prema (love for wealth), lobharthe vinaya (humility for greed), karana saubhagya (good-fortune for purpose), nirmmukta svamisindura (uriped the vermmilion of the husband), silavant, (deferentially modest), vilasavanti (pleasure seeking women), hridayaharini (heart captivating).[16]. If a prostitute had been looked down upon, in a similar fashion the "kuttani" (an old women acting as a go-between in love) has also been denounced.

The second kallola of the *Varṇa-Ratnākara* is nayika varnnana. The personal charms of the nayika or heroine are detailed and also her mental and spiritual attainments. The feet of heroine is beautified with five qualities, her both thighs are plane, soft and like the trunk; her hips are healthy and powerful, fleshy and like the back portion of the tortoise; her waist is thin, soft and round; her hub is round; her soft hairs on the

body are with six qualities; her both the breasts are sticked, healthy and powerful, hard, lofty and globular; her arms are long, round and like the stalk of lotus; her hands are soft, devoted, clear, fine, and like the sprout of red Ashoka tree; her neck is soft like the cotton, and there are three lines on it; her ears are soft, curved, circular and beautified with the golden ornaments; her teeth are fine.[17] Unfortunately this kallola is incomplete because of a leaf 17 is missing. After that the ornaments of a nayika are named,[18] e.g. khuti (an ornament for the ears), sinkali (chain), suta (thread), ekavate (a continuous line,) culi (bangle), valaya (ring),mesala, trika (an ornament worn on the forehead), padmasutra, kankana, (bracelet), nupura (an ornament for the ankles) etc. Then follow some stock comparisons and figures-jani Kamadeva sansara jini ayala takari pataka (as if Kamadeva came after conquerring the world, and she is her banner), jani ekara rupa desaken Indra sahasraksa bhelaha, Brahmane chaturmmukha kaehalu (as if Indra became thousand-eyed to see her beauty, and Brahma made himself four-headed), jani ehi alinge lagi eka Krishna chaturvbhuja bhae gelaha (as if for embracing her one Krishna became fourarmed).

The attendant and confidential friend (sakhi) of the nayaka is then described. Some four different descriptions enumerating the qualities and charms of the sakhi are given Sakhis of the type known as Syama,[19] Citrini,[20] Mohini[21] and Bhadra[22]. Not content with this beautiful description our author gives the points in describing the smile of the heroine[23] Here smile is like all white and pure things known in Sanskrit literature: kumuda (lily), kunda (a kind of jasmine), kadamba, kasa, bhasa, kailasa, karpura (camphor), piyusakakani (like the nectar). The smile ripples along like the waves on the ocean of milk moved by the southern breeze[24] like the waves on the nectar's lake,[25] like the moonlight in the autumn's full moon[26], like the beauty of newly bursted lotus[27] etc. The effect of the smile on the heart of poor young men who see it, is also described.[28] This finishes the second kallola.

Jyotirīśvara has mentioned the women as the skillful house-wife also. In the Prabhata Varnnana, we find that the lady of the house became bashful.[29] The last kallola describes how a skilled house-wife made the milk as curd and fed her hero.[30] The skilled female attendant had been called as 'peshala' in the royal court. In the Sayana Varnana, a nurse (paricharika) gives the betel with camphor in the hand of hero. Female messenger (duti) and servant (dasi) are also mentioned in Veshya Varnnana.[31]

The *Varṇa-Ratnākara* gives an account of the prostitute. Vaishika[32] was an officer of the prostitutes. Kautilya mentions[33] Vaishika kala (education of the prostitute) in his work. In the fourth kallola, Jyotirīśvara says: near the courtyard of the town, there are various brothels surrounded by the boundary walls. The brothels are crowded by pananayika, pratinayika, sakhi, sairandhri, a maid servant, paricharika, dasi, sadi, vandhula[35] bastard, nirlajja, acharahina (debased) nirgati, nirasraya (without shelter), kamuka (full of sexual urge) etc. The flowers are stitching. The fragrant liquids are scattering, the bodies are purifying, the hairs are dressing, the ornaments are ringing, the female messengers are bustling, the lovers are modulating, the bed-rooms are decorating, the betels are collecting, the heroines are appearing in make-up, the amounts are receiving etc. Then the author is criticising the bad habits of the prostitutes. After this we come on the Kuttani Varnnana, which is the description of an old woman acting as a go-between in love intrigues. She is ninetyseven years old, her hairs and eyebrows have turned gray, her body is thin and powerless etc. The author is criticising her had habits. She creates loss of the chaste woman's chastity and changes a lady of the house (kulavadhu) to an unchaste (kutila).

The relation between male and female depends on coitus.[36] We have after the discription of kuttani, as the last item in the fourth kallola, kamavastha varnana enumerating a number of erotic terms, the author's *Pañca-śāyaka* attest to the fact that he was well-versed in the science of erotics. Ten kamas, five arrows of Kamadeva, eight pure and pious

emotions etc. are described. Now the embrace which indicates the mutual love of a man and woman who have come together is of four varieties;- 1. sistaka (touching embrace) 2. vivaka (piercing embrace) 3. udghataka (rubbing embrace) and 4. pidīaka (pressing embrace). The list of the above-mentioned four komalalingana has been taken from the *Kamasutram* of Vātsyāyaṅa[38], these are-1. spristakam, e. viddhakam,3. udghr-stakam and 4. pidīakam. The seven varietis of kathinalingana (closei embrace) is also mentioned, e.g. 1. vrisarudha (climbing a tree) (Vātsyāyaṅa's vriksadhi-rudhakam), 2. lalavestita (twining of a creeper) (Vātsyāyaṅa's lataVeṣṭitakaṁ),3. jaghanoparigudha (embrace of the jaghana or middle parts) (Vātsyāyaṅa's jaghanopaguhanam), 4. tila-tandula (embrace like mixture of sesamum seed with rice) (Vatsyayana's tila-taṅdulakam), 5. ksina (it is wrong and it should be written as kshira (embrace like milk) which tallies with kshiranirakam of Vātsyāyaṅa), 6. nivala and 7. natika-embrace like the short drama. We find after this, the description of the ten types of kissing, viz. 1. sranta- tired kiss, 2. tiryyaka-bent kiss (Vātsyāyaṅa's tiryaka), 3. pidīat-pressed kiss (Vatryayana's pidītakam), 4. vighattita-touching kiss (Vātsyāyaṅa's ghattitakam), 5. uttara-kiss of the upper lip (Vātsyāyaṅa's uttaraḁchumbitam), 6. samputa-clasping kiss (Vātsyāyaṅa's samputakam), 7. anuna, 8. pratirodha (it should be pratibodha, Vātsyāyaṅa mentions it as pratibodhikam-kiss that awakens). 9. sankranta-transgerred kiss (Vātsyāyaṅa's samkrantaka cumbanam) and 10. samaustha. The following are the places for kissing: 1. nayana- the eyes, 2. kantha-the throat, 3. Kapola-the cheeks, 4. adhara-the lips, 5. mukha-the mouth, 6. stana-the breasts, 7. lalata-the forehead, 8. jaghana-the thighs, 9. nabhi-the navel and 10. kaksa- the armpits. Kesakarsana is extra. The following are the types of nail marking -1. ardhachandra-the half moon, 2. mandala-circle, 3. mayurapada- peacock's foot, 4. shasiapluta (Vātsyāyaṅa mentions it is sasaplutakam jump of a hare) and 5. utpalapatra-leaf of a blue lotus. These all the types are taken form the *Kamasutram.*[39] Following are the types of biting marks-1. tilaka-biting of the forehead, 2. pravala-coral, 3. vinduka-point,4. khandabhra-broken

cloud and 5. kola-carva-biting of a boar (Vātsyāyana's varahacarvitakam). The last four kinds are also taken from the *Kamasutram*.[40] Three types of hair dressing are pamahasta, bhujangavali and kmavatansa. Four types of general sexual vigours are 1. padmasana-lotus position, 2. nagarakarenu, 3. viotarita and 4. skandhapada. Only padmasana is taken from the *Kamasutram*. After this, Jyotirīśvara mentions the sixteen kinds of the uttana surata (coitus in the supine position), but we find only thirteen, e.g. 1. samputa-clasping position (Vātsyāyana's samputakam), 2. pidīta-pressing position (Vātsyāyana's pidīakam), 3. Vestita-turing position (Vātsyāyana's Veṣṭitakaṁ), 4. utfulaka-midely open (Vātsyāyana's utfullakam), 5. Vāsava (Vātsyāyana mentions it as vadakam-mare's position),6. ekapada-one footed, 7. arddhapada-half a foot, 8. karkataka-crab's position (Vātsyāyana's karkatakam), 9. vandhurita-curced, 10. nagapasa[41] - a kind of coitus,11. utkantha-a mode of sexual enjoyment, 12. karmma and 13. valitoru. After this we find various types of the acting like a man e.g. 1. pārśvavandha, 2. tiryyaka-bent, 3. adhomukha-having the face downwards, 4. viparita-opposite,5. lata vandha (latavestah of the Rasa-manjari)[42] a kind of coitus, 6. hindolavandha and 7. kirtivandha. Then the six types of sexual education of the heroine are mentioned e.g. the swan, the crane, the dove, a kind of pigeon, sparrow and the sound of the quail. And at last we find the five types of the swatachesta (coitus effort) e.g.- 1. padarasu, e. stanita-sounded, 3. sitkia-the above sound of pleasure during sexual enjoyment, 4. dutakrita and 5. murmmura-the God of Love.

According to Jyotirīśvara, the women of Mithila (Tirahutini) had to be acquainted with sixtyfour kalas.[43] A comparative study of the sixtyfour kalas of the list in the *Sukrarutisara* and the *Varṇa-Ratnākara*[44] shows that Jyotirīśvara knew the *Kamasutra*[45] and the *Bhagavata-Purana*[46] and 20 items of the *Sukranitisara*.[47] He however gives new names to the following arts and crafts mentioned by Vātsyāyana: Kosajnana for abidhanana-Kosa, jalasvadya for udakavadya, jalaghata for udakaghata, kesabandha for kesamardana,

dasanavidhi and vasanavidhi for dasanavasana, durvacanaracana for durvacakayoga, pusparasa for puspastana, pratimaracana for pratimata, prasadhana for bhusanayojana, ratnapariksa for rupyapariksa. Though Vātsyāyana tells us that the study of the sixtyfour kalas was fruitful for princesses and daughters of Mahamatras.[40] But according to Jyotirīśvara, these kalas could not have been studied by women alone.

The sixth kallola concerns itself with the gentle arts of poetry, music and dancing. The patra is a dancing girl, who is well practised in the 32 kinds of movements; and in the 32 kinds of graces (all enumerated). The dancing girl is well-dressed and decorated with the various types of the ornaments. After the floral tributes she dances in the 18 kinds of prabandha naci, 13 kinds of the acting of the head (mathakampa), 36 kinds of the acting of the eyes (drstikampa), 20 kinds of the acting of the hands(hastakampa), 10 kinds of the acting of the arms, 6 kinds of the dancing like restive elephant (calakanrtya), 64 kinds of the manual performance (hastakarmma), 5 kinds of the acting of the breasts and 16 qualities of the total dance. Then she reposes. In the fourth Kallola, we find also the descriptions of the various types of dresses. The thirty kinds of general silk (pattambara), various types of special native silk (desiya patta vastra), various types of undecorated dresses (nirvbhusana vastra and the fourteen kinds of coloured dresses (neta) have been mentioned in it. The Rajya varnana of the last kallola gives an account of women from various lands, viz. Telagana, Maratha, Gauda, Kannauja, Nepala, Malava, Tirahuta, Magadha etc. Then we find the Aṣtanayika Varnana. These eight heroines mostly have been taken from the Dharmashastras.

Thus, the descriptions easily yield to quantification. Jyotirīśvara Thakkura must have been a man with a wholesome all round interest in life. The kaleisdoscopic view of life in North Eastern India of the 14th century as presented in the *Varṇa-Ratnakara* affords a valuable commentary on the epigraphic and other literary records of the contemporary and earlier periods. The names of the various objects of luxury, and other articles of the women-concern mentioned in this

book, are explained by similar terms found in the earlier Sanskrit literature and vice versa. All this goes to make the work a document of first-rate importance in the study of culture in early and mid-medieval times in Northern India.

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13. *Varna-Ratnakar*, 18 ka.
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15. *Ibid.*, 31 kha.
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17. *Ibid.*, 16 kha.
18. *Ibid.*, 18 ka.
19. *Ibid.*, 18.
20. *Ibid.*, 18kha, 19 and 20 ka (leaf 19 missing)
21. *Ibid.*, 20.
22. *Ibid.*, 20kha, 21ka.
23. *Ibid.*, 21ka: अथ नायिकाहस्य वर्ण्णना।
24. *Ibid.*, क्षीर समुद्रक दश्रिणनिले चालल तरड्ग सनक लहरी अइसन।
25. अमृतक सरोवर तरड्गक सहोदर सन।
26. शरतक पूर्णमा चान्दक ज्योत्स्ना अड्सन।
27. अिानव प्रकाशित कमल कोष प्रसारि शोभासन।
28. *Ibid.,21* kha.
29. *Ibid.*, 29kha. कुलस्त्री सलज्ज भेलि।
30. *Ibid.*. 76 kha and 77.
31. *Ibid..*, 39 kha.
32. *Ibid.*, 21 kha.
33. *Arthasastra of kautilya:*Eng. trans. by R. Shanasastry. 3rd ed. Mysore, 1929, 2-27.
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35. *JBRS.*, xxxvii, pt. 1-2, 121.
36. *Mrcchakatikain*, 4-28: परगृह ललिताः परान्नपुष्टाः परपुषैर्जनिताः पराड्गनासु। परधन निरता गुणेष्ववाच्या गजकलभा इव बन्धुला ललामः॥

37. मादन, उन्मादन, प्रक्षोभण, संयोजन, सम्मोहन।
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39. *Ibid.,* pp. 107-108.
40. *Ibid.,* p. 111.
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स्वजङ्घाद्वयमध्यस्यां हस्ताभ्यां धारयण कुचौ।
रमेन्नि:शङ्कितो नारीं बन्धोडयं नागपाशक।।
42. Rasamanjari, qouted from *Ibid.,*1358: बाहुभ्यां पादयुग्माभ्यां वैष्टयित्वा स्त्रियं रमेत लघुलिङ्ग ताडनं योनौ तल्लतावेष्ट मुच्यते।।
43. V*arna-Ratnaklara,* 71 kha.
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Contents